



Lutherans and Catholics on the Way in Southwestern Pennsylvania

Dear Baptized Children of God in southwestern Pennsylvania,

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

As the Catholic and Lutheran bishops (representing the Dioceses of Greensburg and Pittsburgh, the Byzantine Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), and because we share a warm, forthright and collegial relationship with each other, we invite you to join us as we celebrate our unity in Jesus Christ. Together we commit ourselves and our judicatories to a year of commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Five centuries ago an attempt to bring reform to the Church resulted in division and schism among the followers of Jesus Christ. Christ's call to truly be one in Him remains in many ways unrealized due to long-standing misunderstandings and division. That we are not yet able to share in each other's Eucharistic celebrations is but one example for this needed work to foster true, visible unity among Catholics and Lutherans. During this year of commemoration, we invite you to join us in allowing the gospel of Jesus Christ under the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us for a more visible unity manifested in prayer, acts of mercy and common pursuit of peace with justice.

During this year we will:

- Reassess our shared histories and divisions; indeed, we will repent of our prejudices and past mutual condemnations and seek God's forgiveness.
- Examine the progress that fifty years of ecumenical dialogue have brought forth. We will use the "*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*,"¹ "*From Conflict to Communion*,"^{2 3} and "*Declaration on the Way*,"⁴ as tools to assist us in seeking more visible unity as siblings of our Lord Jesus. Our progress in finding consensus on some issues also enables us to address remaining differences among us.
- Emboldened by the gospel of Jesus Christ, Catholic and Lutherans will witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world, and will seek greater unity with other Christians as well.

We encourage you to attend three special events (more details to follow):

An Evening of Repentance - March 14, 2017, 7:00PM

St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cathedral, Munhall,

¹ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html or <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Joint%20Declaration%20on%20the%20Doctrine%20of%20Justification.pdf>

² <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf> or http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html

³ The study guide for "From Conflict to Communion" may be found at: http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/From_Conflict_To_Communion_Study_Guide_3-13.pdf

⁴ http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/lutheran/upload/Declaration_on_the_Way-for-Website.pdf or http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration_on_the_Way.pdf

Liturgy followed by dinner
Theme: REPENTANCE;

An Evening of Witness and Thanksgiving - June 29, 2017, Time: TBA

St. Kilian Roman Catholic Church, Mars
Theme: TESTIMONIAL AND THANKSGIVING

A Day of Commemoration of Hope - October 28, 2017, Time: TBA

Fred Rogers Center, St. Vincent College
Theme: COMMEMORATION OF HOPE (concluding with prayer in St. Vincent Basilica).

Become part of ongoing conversations on Facebook: *Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the Way in Southwestern Pennsylvania!*

We call you to pray for an increase in mutual understanding, reconciliation, and more visible unity of the Church in your local parishes, ecumenical ministeriums and other Christian gatherings. Remember your local pastoral colleagues in your personal prayers, and your neighboring parishes in your Sunday litanies and intercessory prayers. Promote small group inter-parish (Lutherans and Catholics together) exploration of “Declaration on the Way.”

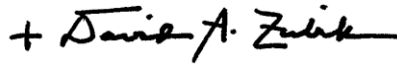
We invite you to join us on the way to reconciliation and healing for the integrity of our witness to God’s mercy for all. As the Apostle Paul declares:

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:16-20)

We, your bishops who share a common commitment to a more visible unity as the body of Christ in the world, amidst our diversity, encourage our clergy, religious and laity to join us during this year as we move our traditions from “conflict to communion.” Together, we pledge our time, mutual prayers and actions in witness and service in this year of commemoration of the Reformation. We invite you to join us “on the way”!



The Rev. Kurt F. Kusserow
Bishop, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



The Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh



The Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic
Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Greensburg



The Most Reverend William C. Skurla
Metropolitan of the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh